



United States Department of State Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations

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Colleagues and friends:

Over the past 18 months the government of Burma has taken initial but critical steps toward reforming its political system, improving the lives of its people, and rejoining the international community. To promote this process, as well as dialogue and cooperation across Burmese society, the U.S. government is actively engaged in new initiatives, including an effort to shore up tenuous ceasefires between the government and armed ethnic groups while addressing another long-time problem: landmines.



Jerry White with fellow landmine survivors

Last year, the Department's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs launched the first-ever U.S.-funded humanitarian mine action project. The program helps educate villagers about the risk of landmines and provides assistance to survivors in Kachin State. To build on this work, a team from the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO), led by Deputy Assistant Secretary [Jerry White](#), visited Burma in October. Jerry co-founded the Landmine Survivors Network and shared in the 1997 Nobel Prize for Peace, awarded to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines.

During their visit, the CSO team spoke with some of the nearly 3,000 citizens who have been injured by landmines since 1999. They heard that more than 3,200 Burmese are known to have died from landmine injuries, though local advocates say the true figure is probably much higher. Jerry quickly developed a rapport with a number of the victims, in part because he lost part of his right leg to a landmine in the Middle East years ago. One amputee, who now makes prosthetics at a modest clinic, told Jerry: "My dream is to get rid of mines and help people get legs to walk on."

In this digital age, we sometimes forget the value of face-to-face contact. Jerry was the highest-ranking U.S. official to visit some parts of Burma in many years, and the people there took notice. In one state, representatives from three armed groups came together to meet with the delegation and presented a joint statement on their concerns. We believe that good, and unexpected, things can happen when diplomats are able to visit out-of-the-way places.

A successful landmine campaign has the potential to pay a significant peace dividend. As a Karen National Progressive Party official in Loikaw said, "The desire is for all groups to come together and talk to figure this out. We see landmine action as a real indicator that the ceasefire can work for peace."

The mine-action initiative we are helping launch integrates mine-risk education, the mapping and marking of minefields, survivor assistance, and eventually the clearance of minefields. While we are excited about the prospects, we understand how deep the divisions are in many parts of this already enchanting land. Fortunately, there is a sense of momentum, as indicated by the historic trip to Burma by President Obama and Secretary Clinton. We feel that the time is right to redouble our efforts to prevent landmine injuries and assist the survivors.

The United States is the largest financial supporter of conventional weapons destruction. Since 1993, the Department of State has partnered with the Department of Defense, USAID's Leahy War Victims Fund, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to deliver over \$2 billion to more than 90 countries, including Burma. To learn more about U.S. government humanitarian mine-action efforts, read [To Walk the Earth in Safety](#) or visit <http://www.state.gov/t/pm/wra>.

The U.S. is pursuing this goal alongside Norway, Denmark, the European Union, and others. We will keep you informed of our progress, and we welcome your ideas on how we might increase our chances of success. You can write us at CSOpublic@state.gov. We also encourage you to forward our news to people you think would like to join this conversation.

Best,

Ambassador Rick Barton
Assistant Secretary for Conflict and Stabilization Operations

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